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Space and Place The Communication of Gentrification to Young People in Hackney

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MSc in Media and Communications

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Dissertation submitted to the Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science, August 2016, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in Media and Communications. Supervised by Professor Lilie Chouliaraki.

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Published by Media@LSE, London School of Economics and Political Science ("LSE"), Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. The LSE is a School of the University of London. It is a Charity and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act (Reg number 70527).

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Space and Place

The Communication of Gentrification to Young People in Hackney

Kimberley Brown

ABSTRACT

Through this research project, I examine the ways in which BME Youth in Hackney communicate their sense of place and attachment to the borough given its current gentrification. As a marginalised group who balance multiple cultures and communities their accounts as well as their participation in planning and place making is neglected. In conducting a focus group I explored the youth's attitudes towards the changes in their neighbourhood. I argue that youths in Hackney communicate their sense of attachment through cultural possession of certain spaces and a moral claim to space. Furthermore, their claims in new spaces are made through a form of territorialisation in which they claim material space by a ritualistic route and pattern performativity - overcoming alienation. Youth place making in Hackney is also legitimized by class contestation and progressive accumulation of capital as affirmation of their symbolic status.

With regards to types of displacement, Lees et al. (2007) make clear that attachment to place should not be ignored nor social networks destroyed. This can happen for example, due to affordability and council housing allocations through which kinships and networks are dispersed. Varying degrees of displacement are further caused by old inhabitants' loss of belonging as the neighbourhood changes to cater to the new inhabitants (Davidson, 2008), or enforce exclusionary policies (Brown-

It is hard to ignore the media's part in the process of gentrification. The re-imagining of space and commodification of culture in the media is ultimately a tool in the mis/appropriation of space. It is a multi-layered process. It has been noted by academics (Neducin et al. 2009; Lees et al. 2007) how the discourse of gentrification has been littered with neutered terms such as, 'urban regeneration', 'urban renewal' and 'social mixing'. Gentrification is an uncomfortable process and therefore it is an uncomfortable term. Lees et al. note, "It's hard to be for 'gentrification', but who would oppose 'urban renaissance', 'urban regeneration', and 'urban sustainability'" (2007: xix)? Similarly, the reframing and application of words such as 'gritty' to mean cool and authentic (Zukin, 2001: 51) is propelled by the media.

Secondly, the media frames space as nothing and then suddenly, new and discoverable. In the 're-making' of neighbourhoods, their 'rough' past is usually highlighted as one of the justifications for gentrification. The media's representations actively reinforce Hackney's past based on its poverty, crime and vagrants etc., however this is not the area in its totality. "Here one can find nearly every kind of food in the shops... Dalston is the UK home of reggae and hip-hop and reputedly has... more artists than anywhere else in London. It is also home to the Rio Cinema and the Arcola Street Theatre..." (Hart, 2003). Duman (2012) elaborates on the above stance, "When nothing of value is registered in the culturally educated aesthetic experience of a given individual or group, the casual

exposure and gentrification processes to their advantage, the commodification of their place of residence as an ethnic neighborhood is ultimately not dependent of their physical presence. As real estate becomes too valuable for their actual presence, symbolic references are often enough to sell the ethnic neighborhood.

(Erbacher, 2011: 245-260)

The whole process of gentrification is a physical and symbolic claim for space. However, as argued space is not empty, meanings already lay where gentrification occurs. It is a contest to

TWO. LITERATURE REVIEW

What is space?

Space can be considered in its cartographic form of region, borders and landscape as a way to map and navigate the world. Furthermore, it can be considered through relationships between things as a means of making sense of the world and place making. Things that are situated within geographical space are spatial. This spatiality refers to, "how space and social relations are made through each other; that is, how space is made through social relations, and how social relations are shaped by the space in which they occur" (Kitchin and Hubbard, 2010: 499).

It was an early thought that space had no effect, however a class of urban geographers along with other interdisciplinary scholars began to theorise the relationship between space, place, culture and identity (Soja 1989; Harvey 1973; Massey 1995; Hall and Jefferson 1976). Harvey (1973: 14) looking beyond space as being absolut

- The [redacted] and conceptualised space of planners and other professionals, which contain objectified representations are seen as the representations of space.
- Spatial practices that legitimize societal ideology, structure reality and patterns of interaction produce and reproduce the normative and have affinity with [redacted] space.
- Finally, representational space of the lived space, everyday experience, is a space of symbols, it overlays the [redacted] space and makes use of objects and implies time and norms (Shields 2010; Merrifield 2000).

These all come together and are internalised as the 'urban'. Lefebvre and Harvey's works illustrates knowing [redacted] and [redacted] is internalised in space enables us knowledge of how to produce space, possess space, produce an entirely different space or city even. "To change life is to change space; to change space is to change life" (Merrifield, 2000: 173). The urban theorist summarises of Lefebvre, "So space - urban space, social space, physical space,

include cultural forms and goods. Cultural capital is positioned as the ability to create classifying practices and itself classify:

For Bourdieu cultural capital is not some generally realisable resource, but a source of social distinction for one group possessing socially legitimised taste, against the tastes of other groups... Those with social power have a monopoly over ways of seeing and classifying objects according to their criteria of good taste. The ability to create new systems of discernment is class power.

(Bridge, 2006: 1966)

Sense of place

Through spatiality, concepts of capital, gentrification and habitus all hold the power to negate social life. In this process a specific set of norms are legitimized and in the context of gentrification this is usually the preferred taste of the middle class, or the new middle class. Bourdieu's significance on class is explored through a chapter in _____, "Bourdieu analyses in great detail the relationships between social groups and social status on the one hand their tastes in clothes, food, furniture, pastimes, music and so on, to show that value judgements about 'good' and 'bad' taste are deeply entwined with social divisions of class, wealth and power" (Painter, 2000: 240). The concept's heavily reliance on class offers its critique. Butler and Robson (2003) highlight the studies of Mike Savage whose interests lay in cultural dimensions of inequality. Spatial inequality establishes the 'language of class' as a marker for the exploration of identity. Savage (2000) notes the declining impact the working class have on determining British culture that was historically built around them but iterates the resistance to letting it define their lives. For Savage, the simplistic 'us' and 'them' is not longer readily accepted in the multicultural capitalistic society, Butler and Robson adds to this, "Britain may remain a class society but it is not one that most of its citizens see as defining their lives" (2003:

of and entitlement to a space that can challenge existing property-based claims and is

Furthermore, the reproduction of these systems and structures (forms of power, control and knowledge) shape social interaction, space and sense of place in a continuous and relative process. The field of gentrification is a fascinating place to explore these concepts at play. Leach writes that architectural discourse is mostly concerned with form, while 'use' stands outside of its concern, "As a result, there is no accepted framework for exploring how people make sense of space and relate to it" (2005: 298). This makes it difficult to explore the relation but it can be more thoroughly conceptualized with empirical case studies and research. As a process that involves people and space, gentrification holds many communication practices that span many disciplines. Much literature can be found on capitalism, displacement, migration and even the media's prominent role in the process, however, less so about the communication processes involved on the ground and what it communicates to residents, especially young people that have grown up in a certain space that is tied with a sense of place. In an attempt to understand how a subordinate group such as BME Youth maintain their sense of belonging and attachment to a place that is yielding to the symbolic and material power of gentrification, I consider how BME Youths communicate their sense of place in their neighbourhood in the context of their possible displacement due

THREE. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The data was analyse

In contrast to, "are we really gonna use- I dunno- are we really gonna use the Travelodge across, next to Hackney Central" or, "I went down that road going up to the (inaudible) way by Dalston, by Hackney Central and saw a TKMaxx (noises) now I ain't been down that road for time, so I (a) () () 2 (I1T Q)(a5)Itide ratoI, (a)[(to 10 (e) -3 (oi) Q)(a-3 (oi)2 (ti)-3 (oi) Q)(a [(toi)-4 (a

rough, it's not grimey, it's just Hackney... there's a perception that doesn't really exist anymore...it's still kind of gangster, or you-

and who we are in society. It is Harvey's cause and effect of social life. Also, if we consider Lefebvre's three dimensions of space, where place-making happens on every layer, the strands discussed here lend themselves to the conceived space, the perceived and lived space. They all come together and are internalised and applied to the change, reproduction or possession of space (Merrifield, 2000).

Capital

Spatial practices and structures shape a sense of place through the habitus; a cognitive sense

people there... and they, they have more resource and they have more power and they have more influence, so what's happening now is, they're starting to do their thing and it's either you join them or you... get out.

I just think that we need to take advantage of the opportunities and our culture because a lot of them, I'm not being rude, their, their culture is very like very minimal, yeah, limited, yeah, and our culture is vibrant and all of that and I feel like we need to

catalysts for this change. It is interesting to note these (listed below) were targeted at or involved the youth in part.

I was thinking that you know, that all worked in- hand in hand, the the riots, yeah, the riots, Joint Enterprise, Olympics, (inaudible) Operation Shield (multiple people talking, inaudible) that was a cleanup...that was a cleanup! (multiple people talking, inaudible) Hackney got cleansed! Hackney got cleansed!

Again, the youths feel they are benefiting from day to day changes to their neighbourhood that arose indirectly.

I think that's true and uhm I'm happy to see that the area has changed but it's the way it's sort of changed... but I always think if they wanted to they could've really sorted it out earlier than they did

Mostly importantly, the neighbourhood

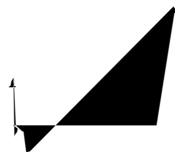
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank my dissertation supervisor Professor Lilie Chouliaraki in the Media and Communications department at the London School of Economics and Political Science for her patience and clarity. A special thanks to the esteemed professors that contributed their opinions and guidance on my topic as well as to the staff in the department for their continuous support. I would also like to thank my peer and secondary researcher

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APPENDIX 3. TOPIC GUIDE

Self-

General Questions

- Where are your families from in terms of country, culture and nationality?
- Where were you born?
- What nationality do you identify with? Where do you consider yourself to be from?

Place

- Do you spend much of your free time in Hackney?
- Do you consider Hackney your home? Or is it just a place you live in?
- In what way, if a

This process is sometimes called Urban renewal, regeneration or gentrification (the transformation of a working

- Are there any barriers? Such as affordability?
- Have you ever been informed of any new spaces that are public and is for the use of everyone, anyone? Even if they are within new developments.
- As far as you know, have the private developers in Hackney (the people building the new private residencies) contribute to the community in any way? Funding, public spaces, etc.?
- Whose needs are being serviced with the newest buildings, facilities and spaces in Hackney?

Whose needs do you feel are most being met by the local government?

- Do you feel as if any of the recent changes are for your benefit?
 - Is there a way to benefit from them, personally?
- There is talk of Hackney changing for the better, how much do you agree with this idea?
 - Is Hackney safer?
 - Is Hackney cleaner?
 - Is Hackney more policed?
 - Why do you think this is?
-

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